'No more excuses' to skip voting

California Secretary of State Alex Padilla (left) shakes hands with political science senior Denise Ramos (right) after Thursday's ribbon-cutting ceremony at the MLK Library.
MAURICIO LA PLANTE | SPARTAN DAILY

Voting center opens on campus

By Mauricio La Plante & Kunal Mehta
ASST. NEWS EDITOR & SCIENCE & TECH EDITOR

Enter, register and vote.

That's what San Jose State students living in Santa Clara County can now do at the voting center in the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library.

"[Voting] was easy," undeclared freshman Lulu Ashenfelder said after casting her ballot at the new on-campus vote center Monday. "I was passing by and didn't know [the vote center] was here until this morning."

Elected officials, San Jose State students and campus administrators celebrated the opening of the university's first-ever voting center Thursday for the March 3 presidential primary election.

Located on the ground floor of the Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Library, in the space of the former Friends of the Library Bookstore, the center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day until March 3, when it will be open from 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Ashenfelder, who's from Sonoma County, now lives in the dorms and registered to vote in Santa Clara County right before casting her ballot.

"It took a second, but it was easy," she said.

State law changes lead to SJSU vote center

Voter's Choice Act	Assembly Bill 59
The act allows counties to replace assigned polling places with vote centers that any county resident can use to cast their ballot. The county would also send out vote-by-mail ballots to all registered voters ahead of time.	AB 59 instructed counties to prioritize placing voting centers on college campuses, in addition to 14 other pre-existing considerations. The law was signed on Oct. 8, 2019, and implemented for the March 3 primary election.

"Just go do it, it's not hard. It takes a half hour of your time. There's no reason not to."

Any eligible citizen with residency in Santa Clara County can register to vote directly at the vote center, if they were not already automatically registered to vote.

Students can also drop off their vote-by-mail ballots at the voting center or in the drop-off boxes located in front of Clark Hall and in the center of Campus Village.

U.S. House Reps. Zoe Lofgren and Anna Eshoo joined California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, Assembly member Ash Kalra, Santa Clara County Registrar

of Voters Shannon Bushey and SJSU President Mary Papazian in cutting the ribbon to open the center.

"Young people turned to vote in 2018 in record numbers, and I know that increased accessibility and services that come with a vote center, especially right here on campus, will make strides on how civic engagement and casting a vote occur among busy college students," Kalra said.

SJSU Votes was a project of the Political Participation class taught by Mary Currin-Percival, a political science professor.

"It reinforces the passion for what we do and what we want to do," Figueroa said. "Even if you don't want to vote for a president, vote local."

For Papazian, the importance of having students vote was simple.

"Elections matter, voting matters," Papazian said. "Voting may in fact be the fundamental expression of our civic engagement."

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Santa Clara County implements easier access to voting

By Kunal Mehta
SCIENCE & TECH EDITOR

Under the California Voter's Choice Act, Santa Clara County voters can now go to any vote center in the county and cast their ballots.

Every center will open the weekend before primary day on March 3, if not earlier, California Secretary of State Alex Padilla said.

The act has dramatically changed the way Santa Clara County voters can fulfill their civic duty.

"We've gone out and looked at over 1,000 locations in Santa Clara County to determine our best sites for our 110 vote centers," said Shannon Bushey, the Santa Clara County Registrar of Voters.

Citizens can also register to vote at the centers on the same day they cast their ballots.

Former Santa Clara County Supervisor Ken Yeager said that he remembered when you had to register a month before the election to vote.

"The more barriers you take away, the more people are likely to vote," he said.

For the first time in Santa Clara County history, all registered voters should have already received a vote-by-mail ballot, regardless of whether they had previously requested one or not.

Padilla touted the new system as "no more excuses" voting.

He said, given all of the new options and times, people can no longer say they didn't have enough time to vote or that their assigned polling place wasn't convenient for them.

Ryan Cajes, associate trainer for the Registrar of Voters and 2017 business and finance SJSU alumnus, demonstrated the county's new ballot marking device at the vote center's ribbon-cutting ceremony Thursday.

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WATCH A DEMO OF A BALLOT MARKING DEVICE ON YOUTUBE

> While this is great for students, it's very convenient for everybody who works at a university; you have professors, administrators and classified staff.
>
> **Alex Padilla**
> California Secretary of State

The device allows voters, especially those with disabilities that could prevent them from filling out a standard paper ballot, to make their selections on a touch screen before printing out a ballot with their selections on it.

"Even though this is an electronic process, in the end, all of our ballots are on paper," Cajes said.

Assembly member Ash Kalra authored Assembly Bill 59, which made placing voting centers on college campuses a priority, after hearing about the "dramatic increase in participation" that Sacramento State saw in 2018.
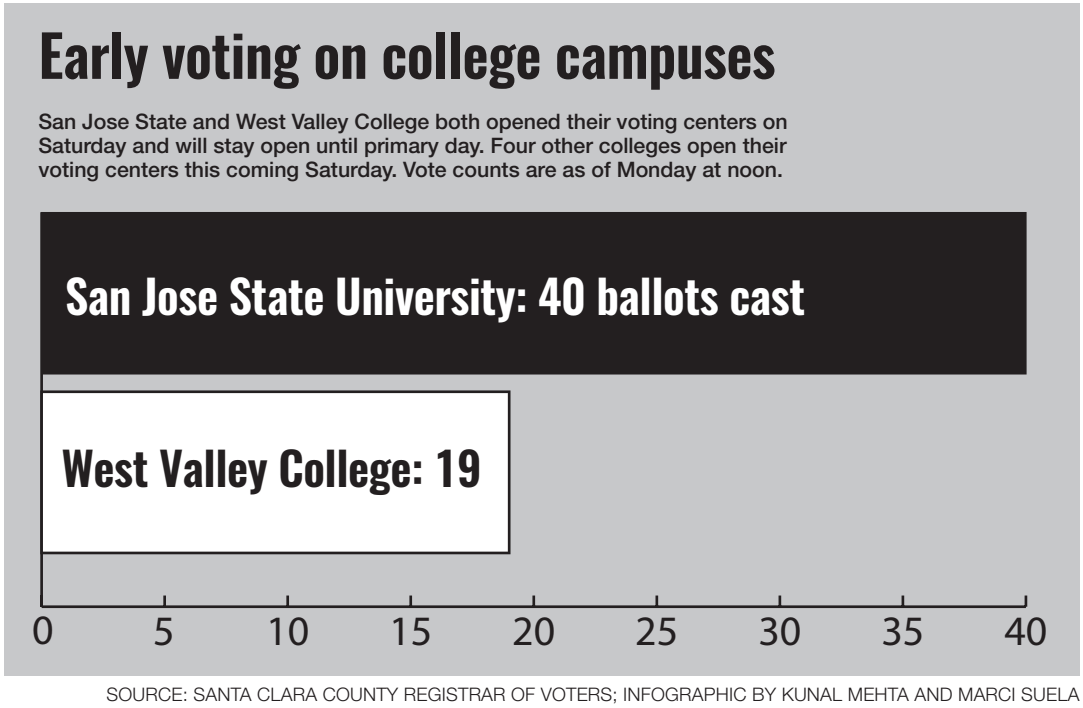
He commended Bushey and SJSU President Mary Papazian for preparing to host a voting center on campus in May 2019, before the bill was even signed.

Padilla said that he doesn't just want to see higher youth turnout, but rather higher voter turnout "across the board."

"While this is great for students, it's very convenient for everybody who works at a university; you have professors, administrators and classified staff," he said.

California is demonstrating to the rest of the nation that elections can both be accessible and secure, Padilla said.

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Early voting on college campuses

San Jose State and West Valley College both opened their voting centers on Saturday and will stay open until primary day. Four other colleges open their voting centers this coming Saturday. Vote counts are as of Monday at noon.

San Jose State University: 40 ballots cast	
West Valley College: 19	

0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40

SOURCE: SANTA CLARA COUNTY REGISTRAR OF VOTERS; INFOGRAPHIC BY KUNAL MEHTA AND MARCI SUELA

Town Hall: California leads U.S. in securing election processes

Left to right: U.S. Reps. Zoe Lofgren and Anna Eshoo listen to California Secretary of State Alex Padilla speak about election security while SJSU President Mary Papazian moderates the town hall Thursday evening.
MAURICIO LA PLANTE | SPARTAN DAILY

By Kunal Mehta
SCIENCE & TECH EDITOR

California is on the "cutting edge" of increasing election access and security, U.S. Rep. Zoe Lofgren said Thursday.

Following the ribbon-cutting ceremony, San Jose State hosted an election security town hall with Lofgren and U.S. Rep. Anna Eshoo and California Secretary of State Alex Padilla, moderated by SJSU President Mary Papazian at the Hammer Theatre Center.

"Any voting system used by any county in California first must be tested and certified by the state, that it meets our requirements," Padilla said. "Among the security requirements we have in California, No. 1 is paper ballots."

The paper record allows for recounts and audits to ensure the

results are accurate, Padilla said.

"We have to have paper ballots," Eshoo said. "And we saw earlier, even though it's electronic, the [ballot marking device] at the voting center – that produces a paper ballot."

The device prints out a paper ballot with the voter's selections and a bar code for scanners to quickly tabulate the vote.

"Voting systems, by law in California, cannot be connected to the internet," Padilla said. "The machines we use to mark the ballots, to cast the ballots, to count the ballots, we keep them intentionally offline, making it impossible to systematically hack or rig an election."

Padilla also touted the audits that counties are required to conduct after each election, in which the votes at 1% of precincts are checked.

Starting with the upcoming primary

election, counties can optionally conduct a risk-limiting audit, which "provides a more robust methodology of ballot review," according to a 2018 statement from the Padilla's office.

California is already doing all of the right things, Lofgren said.

"The good news is that virtually everything in the [Securing America's Federal Elections] (SAFE) Act that we passed in the House, California has already done," she said.

The SAFE Act would provide funding to states to improve their elections infrastructure, including hiring IT staff and performing cybersecurity trainings, according to a summary provided by Lofgren's office.

The act would require states to ensure that none of their "systems that count ballots or upon which voters mark their

ballots" connect to the internet.

The state has taken it one step further by working to fight misinformation and disinformation, Padilla said.

"We have already established protocols with the Twitters, Facebooks and Instagrams of the world to report [disinformation] to them," he said.

But most importantly, Padilla said, California has shown it is possible to increase both the accessibility and security of elections.

"California believes not just in the fundamental right to vote, but to maintain the security and integrity of our elections while doing more and more and more to increase access to the ballot for all eligible citizens," Padilla said.

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Representatives celebrate SJSU's new vote center

County officials and our elected representatives in Sacramento and Washington represented nearly every level of government at the vote center ribbon-cutting ceremony. Nearly all of them have made individual appearances at SJSU before, but this was the first time that they all came together for a single event.

Zoe Lofgren
U.S. Representative, 19th district
Gilroy, Morgan Hill and San Jose

Lofgren sponsored the SAFE Act, which would provide funding to states to improve their election infrastructure while setting minimum security requirements that all elections need to follow.

Anna Eshoo
U.S. Representative, 18th district
Redwood City, Sunnyvale, Mountain View, Palo Alto and San Jose

Eshoo voted for the SAFE Act in the U.S. House of Representatives and has pushed for the federal government to strengthen its response to foreign interference in American elections.

Alex Padilla
Secretary of State
California

Padilla led efforts to increase election access through the Voter's Choice Act and New Motor Voter program while maintaining the state's election security through audits and certifications of all electronic devices.

Ash Kalra
Assembly member, 27th district
San Jose

Kalra wrote Assembly Bill 59, which prioritized placing voting centers at college campuses. Six colleges in Santa Clara County will be hosting voting centers for the March 3 primary election, including San Jose State.

Shannon Bushey
Registrar of Voters
Santa Clara County

Bushey implemented the Voter's Choice Act for Santa Clara County, giving voters the ability to vote at any center in the county. Her office started working with SJSU in May 2019 to bring a vote center to campus.